

COUNCIL BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Civic Programme - Reception for Overseas Students 17th January 2008

Report of Head of Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the future of the annual Reception for Overseas Students.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee consider the options in relation to the holding of a Civic Reception for Overseas Students.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Council, at its meeting on 6th December 2006, gave consideration to a number of events in the Civic Calendar, one of which was the annual Mayoral reception for Overseas Students.
- 1.2 Recent years have seen the number of students attending the event decline dramatically, with only one fifth of the number invited actually attending. For the last three years the event has been enhanced with the addition of Morris Dancers, which although popular have not encouraged any greater number to attend the event.
- 1.3 At the request of the Council Business Committee, contact was made with both Lancaster and Cumbria Universities to establish a working group to discuss the future of the event. Despite best attempts a meeting of the previous organisers of the event and the Student Union representatives from both Universities did not occur. In October 2007 a letter was sent to the Vice Chancellors of both Universities asking for their comments and views on the future of this event.
- 1.4 The letter sent to the Vice Chancellors included the views of the Council Business Committee of 13th September 2007, when the Committee had indicated that they were keen to have an event which would provide information on Council Services and which would be inclusive to all first year students. The options provided to the Vice Chancellors were to have:
 - (a) A reception for a limited time on a first come first served basis (in an evening);
or
 - (b) An open house event over a longer period (during an afternoon into the early evening).

To be held:

- (a) In December, prior to the search by students for housing in the district; or
- (b) In the summer term, prior to students preparing to move off campus.

2.0 Proposal Details

- 2.1 Due to the lack of clarity resulting from exchanges with the Universities to date, three possible options for the future of the event have been considered. These are

Option 1 – to continue with the Reception for Overseas Students in its current format

Option 2 – to continue with the Reception but extend the invitation to all first year students and vary the format aiming at providing information to students who are likely to be leaving the campus and moving to living independently in Lancaster or Morecambe.

Option 3 – to discontinue the event.

- 2.2 Option 1 would involve holding a reception for a maximum of 500 international students studying at both Lancaster and Cumbria Universities. The format for the event is an evening reception hosted by the Mayor with wine and soft drinks. For the past few years, there has also been the addition of Morris Dancers.
- 2.3 Option 2 would be to extend an invitation to all first year students attending Lancaster and Cumbria Universities. This could be held either on restricted basis in an evening on a first come first served basis, or as an open house over an afternoon/evening. By opening the event to more students over a longer period there would be an increase in room hire costs.
- 2.4 Option 3 would be to discontinue the event. The numbers attending have declined over recent years despite efforts to rejuvenate the event. The Council Business Committee seem keen to adapt the event to provide greater information to more students but neither University has provided overwhelming support for this change.

3.0 Details of Consultation

- 3.1 The Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria were made aware of the views of the Council Business Committee and were asked to provide their comments or ideas on the proposals outlined in 1.3 above.
- 3.2 The University of Cumbria responded on 16 October 2007 stating that they would prefer to have a reception for international students at the University of Cumbria and that they could identify possibly 20 students who may be willing to attend.
- 3.3 The University of Lancaster responded on 21 December 2007 stating that they would support the continuation of a social event such as the reception for students and they could see that the integration of UK and international students in a joint social event would be appropriate. They have also stated that they would not be able to estimate how many students would wish to take up an invitation to such an event, and that perhaps the City Council should considering ensuring that first year postgraduate students are included as they are often living out in the community. They also feel that it is important that the City Council has a clear aim for the event in mind and the previous overseas receptions have always provided a pleasant welcome to the City and allowed students to engage with notions of Lancaster as a City and a tourist destination for themselves as well as friends and family.

3.4 As there is no clear way forward, both Universities have been advised that this matter will be put to this Committee and have been invited to send representatives to the meeting. Neither University have confirmed at this time whether anyone will be attending.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 The Reception for Overseas Students has been declining as an event for a number of years. Council, through the Civic Task Group and the Council Business Committee, have considered ways to rejuvenate and improve attendance but without more positive responses from the Universities the Officer view is that efforts are better focussed in engaging the Universities in other ways.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the annual Reception for Overseas Students is currently contained within the budget provided for Mayoral Functions and Hospitality. Should the event continue in some format it would expected that this would remain the case.

Discontinuing the event will allow the funding currently utilised for this event to be available for the enhancement of other events in the Mayoral calendar as agreed by Council in December 2006 following the review of the civic programme.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letters to the Vice Chancellors of the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria dated 01 October 2007.

Letter from the University of Cumbria dated 16 October 2007.

Letter to the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria dated 20 November 2007.

Letter from the University of Lancaster dated 21 December 2007.

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